

A  
S E R M O N,

P R E A C H E D

At the Opening of the L E C T U R E  
A T

M A L D O N in E S S E X.

Lately Established

By the Lord Bishop of *London*:

In Vindication

Of the Antiquity of the Doctrine of the  
C H U R C H of E N G L A N D.

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By *William Bramston*, Late Fellow of *Queens-College* in *Cambridge*,  
and Rector of *Woodhamwater* in *Essex*.

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Published at the Request of the Auditory.

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L O N D O N,

Printed for *R. Clavell*, at the *Peacock* in *St. Paul's*  
Church-Yard, M D C X C V I I.

A

# SERMON

PREACHED

At the Opening of the LECTURE

AT

MALDON in ESSEX.

Lately Published

By the Lord Bishop of London:

In Westminster

Of the Accuracy of the Doctrine of the  
CHURCH of ENGLAND.

By William Becket, Fellow of St. John's College,  
and Rector of Westminster in 1711.

Published at the Request of the Authors.

L O N D O N

Printed for R. Clavel, at the Printing-Office in St. Pauls  
Church-yard, 1711.

# S E R M O N,

P R E A C H E D.

At the opening the *Wednesday* Lecture in  
*All-Saints Church in Maldon.*

Acts, Chap. 24. Verse 14.

*But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which  
they call Heresie, so worship I the God of my  
Fathers.*

**I**N the way to my Text, I judge it a reasonable tribute of  
our gratitude to our Diocesan, to observe, how those blessed  
Effects, and Influences of his paternal care and watchful-  
ness, which are conspicuous in all places of his Jurisdic-  
tion, are in the most sensible manner made apparent to you,  
the Inhabitants of this remote, and almost forgotten corner of  
the Kingdom; and that in the occasion of our present meet-  
ing, wherein you have restored to you a most laudable Privi-  
lege,

lege, which you have long wanted, your Weekly Lecture: In which you must needs acknowledge your engagements to your Bishop, who hath made himself a debtor to many Brethren for your sakes: Nor is the Benefaction its self more worthy of your Gratitude, than the piety of his Lordships intention in this Lecture, may be commanding of your Thankfulness: Our Bishops Hopes and Counsels, and Prayers, are, not only that you may have the gracious Arguments of Virtue, Patience, Righteousness, and Holiness, without which, *No Man shall see the Lord*, unfolded, and recommended to your Practice in the most perswasive Applications; but also, that you may continue in all soundness of Doctrine, and become armed against the arts, and surprises of false Teachers, who do either obtrude their own Traditions, for the Commandments of God, or attempt to withdraw the Affections of Men from our most excellent Church by false and unwarrantable misinterpretations of her Doctrines. I say our most Excellent Church, which is loaded by Rome, with the imputations of Heresie, because she endeavours to throw her Members from the taint of Rome's Defilements: And has been reviled by another sort of mistaken Christians, as being her self Popish, because she labours to preserve the Holy Services of God clean, from the unhallow'd violence of Man's Profaneness: Now there cannot be a greater Service done to the Church of Christ, than when his precious *Depositum* is kept unviolated, or to the Edification of his Faithful, than, when the Instructions tendered to them proceed purely from Truth and Soberness: This being our Bishops (now Charitable) Intention in this Lecture which I am to open, I have made choice of this passage of *St. Paul*, who here answers the impeachment of the Jews, who had censured his Labours in Christ, his professing, and propagating the Christian Religion, (just as our Adversaries of the Church of Rome do all our holy Ministrations, and Services in the support of the Faith, and truth of the Blessed Jesus) as a work of Heresie, with this Confession, *But her I profess unto thee, that*  
*after*



after the way that they call *Heresie*, so worship I the God of my *Fathers*. That which I shall endeavour at present, shall be the vindication of the Doctrines and Measures of our Church, as to some Matters of her Faith and Practice, which are quarrelled at by our *Roman* Adversaries; which, in the most insolent Pomp, and disdain, are exploded by them as Spots, and Deformities in our Reformation. *First*, then, That wherewith they think they shake us most, is this, that we are of a new Religion, a novel and up-start Church, not able to make out a continuance for two of sixteen Centuries.

This I take to be the most gainful plea of the Crafts-men of their *Diana*, that by which she most fatally assures many into the Labyrinth of her Delusions: Certainly as to her Doctrines, the Monstrosities of Transubstantiation, Purgatory, of the Sacrifice of the Mass, and Prayers in a strange Language; these can have no appearances so beautiful and tempting, as to prove Charming in themselves, and captivate our Souls enlighten'd by the wisdom of the Gospel: But when they are told they embrace a new Religion, a Religion not heard of in the Christian World till these last two Hundred Years; this may possibly startle ignorant Men, and justly requires our Consideration: In answering therefore this Objection, I doubt not to expose the vanity, and disappoint the impressions of such light pretences, and manifest them to be no other but Noise and Cant. *First*, Then, if by a new Church, they mean a Church introducing a new Scheme of Faith and Belief; methinks that main part of old essential Verities, wherein they and we agree, together with our explicit belief of all the known Doctrines of the Scriptures, and our implicit belief of all things therein contained, may in great measure declare the Antiquity of ours; especially since we retain all that Faith, and religiously adhere to all those Creeds, which the third General Council held at *Ephesus*, adjudged to be so material and comprehensive, as positively to forbid the imposition or addition of any other, if that was the Old Faith

which was professed by the Primitive Fathers of that Council, how can ours now be denominated a new one, who have neither diminished nor added to the Articles of their Belief? The Creeds confirmed, and authorized in that Council, were that of the Apostles, and that of *Nice*, and therefore methinks the Faith founded on them may with some face pretend to Antiquity.

Again, if by a new Church, they mean a National Church of but late Strength and Establishment; we deny not the present Church of *England* to be a new Church in such a sense; but then we answer withal, that such a new Church may be said, without a Paradox, to contain as Old a Religion as the ancientest foundation of Christ, though not for the Age of its Establishment, yet for the Antiquity of its Truths and Doctrines, which only (properly speaking) can Entitle any National Church a part of the ancient Church of Christ: And this is the highest mark of Antiquity our Church pretends to assume, that she now professes that very Faith which our Saviour taught, which his Holy Apostles profess'd, and propagated in the first Ages of Christianity. And let Men pretend what they will, the only Demonstration and Test of any particular Churches Antiquity (as it is a true or a corrupted part of the Catholick Church of Christ) must be the Antiquity of her Doctrines and Principles, by reason as no Christian Church can be ancientser than Christ, the Author and Finisher of our Faith: So again, no particular Church, professing his ancient Faith and Truths, can be said to introduce, or embrace a Religion younger than that of Christ; because it then professes that very truth of Christ, which has been professed by his Faithful in all Ages: So that though the Church of *England* may be later than the Church of *Rome*, in such respects as these; either, because our Conversion to the Faith might possibly have been after theirs; or again, because our particular establishment, as it now stands, was enacted many Ages since the first settlement of

of a Christian Church at *Rome*: Yet our Religion now, may be ancients still, than theirs at present; if they are now changed, and degenerated (as 'tis demonstrable they are) from that Christian Purity, which anciently denominated them an uncorrupted part of the Catholick Church; and we now faithfully adhere with all Uprightness and Integrity (which we are ready to make appear we do) to that Faith of Christ which was once delivered to the Saints; and as by many other Churches, so anciently maintain'd by the Church at *Rome*: For, as their new corruptions, and additional definitions of Faith must fall short of those Ages wherein Christianity flourished with all Truth and Purity; and those can be no other than the Days of Christ, and his Apostles; so the old truths retained and professed by us, must have been then most triumphant and prevailing. And therefore that which has puzzled so many weak and unlearned People of our Communion, to wit, the question about the Age of our Religion, and our Church, may easily be resolved if they distinguish the Antiquity of Seat and Place (which is nothing to the business) from the Antiquity of Truths and Doctrines; and this distinction must be allowed good even by our Adversaries themselves, if they consider, that the dispute now is not about the Antiquity of particular Sees and national Constitutions, but the Antiquity of Faith and Religion its self, which I hope may be the same in a Church of Yesterday's Conversion, as it was in *Antioch*, which had the honour to give the first Name to Christians.

Did the Church of *Rome* at any time esteem her own Antiquity lessened, upon such a Consideration as this, that St. Peter erected his Apostolical Seat first at *Antioch*, before ever he had arrived at *Rome*? Or will she acknowledge a deference due to that Church in point of Faith and Purity, because she had the happiness to be Christened before her? I doubt the Mother and Mistress of all Churches, as she delights to stile her self, could never stoop to such a Condescension: If my Faith be

be sound, and perfect now, can it be believed the more new, and up-start, because not professed by my Fore-fathers, who knew not the Truths? Or does my late Conversion if good and upright diminish, or derogate from the Antiquity of Truth its self? The Antiquity of all other things is calculated from their Original, and beginning in the World, and why the same rule won't do in Faith and Religion I understand not. Indeed, if any particular Church could make out a continu'd Succession in all circumstances of Doctrine and Discipline, from the times of the Apostles, unto this very day, this would no doubt be an incomparable Argument both of her Antiquity, and of God's especial Goodness and Providence over her: But the present *Roman* Church can no more make out such a Succession than the present Church of *England*; and if she could, still such a Succession is not to be esteem'd the only mark of Truth and Antiquity: And this I think cannot be more clearly illustrated than from Matter of Fact, to which, we may appeal in this case; for instance, there can be no Question, but the ancient Faith of Christ is now professed by the true Faithful of Christ, and shall continue to be so professed till the Day of Judgment; and yet there is now no particular Church of the Faithful that can make out such a Succession, nor any one Church endowed with an assurance of continuing indefectibly in that very State in which she is now, till the Day of Judgment.

I know the Church of *Rome* would fain have us believe her inspired with these infallible Accomplishments, but she must produce a better Scheme of her Perfections, than what we meet in her *Trent* Definitions; or she will never persuade us, that she is any more like the Church Establish'd at *Rome* by *St. Peter*, than *St. Peter* himself was like the most changed and backsliding Apostle: For as to her Magnificent Stile in writing her self the Church Apostolick, this must appear rather a Character of Ornament and Shew, than any certain signification of her necessary continuance in Truth and Purity. For,  
were

were not the Apostolick Sees as liable to relapse, and degenerate, as any founded by their Successors? Where is the glory of *Antioch*, *Ephesus*, and *Alexandria*, which the Apostles themselves planted and watered with the Dew of Heaven, which those Heavenly Shepherds nourish'd with the blessed Food of Evangelical Righteousness? And notwithstanding all the applauses with which the present *Romanists* exalt themselves; I doubt not, but were *St. Peter* to arise this moment from the Dead, and visit the Conclave, or inspect the Councils of *Rome*, but he would be very much put to it, where to find Faith on Earth.

I say therefore, her being founded by an Apostle (if we grant thus much) can no more Entitle her indefectible in the Faith, than it has the Churches of *Antioch*, *Ephesus*, and *Alexandria*, which have either altogether failed, and forsaken the Name of Christ; or are (at least according to their own *Roman* Tenents) quite cut off for Schism or Heresie from the Communion of what they call the true Church; let her shew when, and where, God has anointed her with this Oyl of Perfection above her Fellows: But now then, if an Apostolick Church may thus recoil, and become impure, (nay, since Christianity shall not fail) why must not some Churches be most pure, which yet are not Apostolical, I mean taught and instructed by the lively voice of the Apostles? If this be bad arguing, what may we think of all the Churches Converted, and founded many Ages since the days of the Apostles? Or, if this be a good Inference, what Objection can it be against any particular Church which is sound, and upright in all her Doctrines, that she has not continued for ever, that she is yet but of a very late Birth and Duration? If her Doctrines are as Old as the Scriptures, can the Religion of such a Church fall short of the Age of the Gospel? If her holy Principles flourished in the ancientest Creeds and Councils, can she reasonably be Reproach'd for an Innovation of Two Hundred Years ago? This is the very case of the



the Church of *England*, and for the truth of it, we appeal to the Scriptures, to the ancientest Creeds, and Councils. Indeed, the Church of *Rome* makes a great noise and show with the flourish of her Succession; but if she means a Succession in purity of Doctrines, we may easily convince her of Vanity and Tattle; if she means a Succession in the outward circumstances, and appearances of a Church, such as consists in true Pastors, Bishops, and the like; I answer, that there may be such a visible Succession, and yet that Church that enjoys it in many respects may be very corrupt and unwarrantable; and this I think is sufficiently acknowledg'd by the Church of *Rome* her self, which does so far acknowledge the Succession of the *Greek Church*, as to receive those Ordained by her, into her Communion, with allowance of Orders received before; and yet whoever considers the terms in which the Eastern Church now stands, with that at *Rome*, must see little reason to conclude much of its Perfection, from the Argument of Succession; indeed, there cannot be a true Church without true Pastors and Bishops, but there may be true Pastors and Bishops, *i. e.* Pastors, and Bishops rightly called, and truly ordained, without a true Church in other respects: Such Succession will indeed prove the Antiquity of the Seat and Place, and justly denominate it a part of the Catholick Church of Christ; but it can be no convincing Demonstration of the purity of its Faith and Doctrines: And therefore it must follow, that, even from an erroneous Church, may be derived a true Ministry and Ordination; but, yet it can be no greater Argument, that such a particular Church, namely, as the Church of *Rome*, is a pure Church now, because an other, to wit the Church of *England*, who is really so, owes her Orders or first Episcopal imposition to hers; than it can be, that because such a particular Man, for his own personal Virtue and Integrity, shall certainly go to Heaven, therefore he also shall do so, who made him a Christian: And this I the gladder mention, because it plainly answers that Sophistical Induction of the *Romanists*,

*manifests*, which infer that, because we say our Church derives her Orders from her; therefore by proving our selves to be a true Church, we must necessarily conclude their's to be so, which is the same, as if a Man in declaring his Opinion of their being Orthodox in some points and particulars, shou'd be concluded positively to maintain them to be most regular in all others. A more rational Inference from what has been said in this case of Succession, must certainly be this, that such a Local Succession of Pastors, and a settled Establishment from the days of the Apostles to this time, is not essential to the constitution of a true Church; but rather on the other side, whatever Church hath a lawful Ministry, and a right Profession of sound Doctrine (let her Succession be never so inconsiderable, though not exceeding two years) must have an equal Right and Title to a Membership in the ancient Body of Christ, as any particular Church of the most venerable Succession: And the reason of the thing is very plain, for, if a Church has a true Ministry, and a right belief, now what signifies it how long she has enjoy'd it; she can then want no means to bring Souls to Heaven, and what advantage can the ancientest Constitution in the World obtain above her: The Seat where the Religion is fixed may be new, but the Religion Establish'd, as Old as Truth it self: And thus I hope the Churches which were the earliest planted in the World, were as true Churches the first day after their Plantation, as when they had survived various Centuries: So that it must be impertinent in our Adversaries to require us to produce a Succession of Protestant Bishops, so long as there cou'd be no reason any Bishops shou'd be called Protestant; *i. e.* Such Bishops, who protest against Innovations and Corruptions in the Religion of Christ, till they had defiled God's heavenly Truths with their Traditionary Pollutions; or again, so long as we prove our Protestant Faith and Church to be no other, but a Professor of that Faith, and a Member of that Apostolical Church, which they have Corrupted; or lastly, so long as



they are Corruptions introduced by them, which we disavow, and protest against: Let them prove us defective in any one essential point of a true Church, and we will yet thankfully receive it, but this their own fruitless endeavour towards it, may evince they cannot, and therefore to talk of Novelty and Innovations, where the Truths are as ancient as the Gospel, and the Apostles, must argue great Folly in them that urge it, but more inconsideration in us shou'd we regard it. As we are able to justify our cause from all their foulest Imputations, so shall they never be able to prove our Religion a Novelty, though its Establishment were but of Queen *Elizabeth*; for it is the Antiquity of true Faith only, that we contend for, which can never be obscured by the latest Profession, because what was truth in the Apostles time must be so now; and that Church, which cleaves stedfastly to that, (be its Succession never so late) must be both Catholick and Apostolick in the purest meaning.

After all this stir of Novelty and Antiquity, I see no other difference in our case, and that of the *Romanists* but this, that our Religion is apparently conspicuous in the best and most Apostolical Centuries; and their's manifest enough in the flourishing Days of Ignorance and Superstition, when Scriptures were banished, and the least appearance of such Truth, as seemed to thwart the progress of an aspiring Monarchy, was silenced and disabled: That which seems so much to take with inconsiderate Men, to wit, such Quenies as this, Had not God his true Church in these days of Blindness and Ignorance, which you Protestants allude to, if so, Then which cou'd be this true Church, but that at *Rome*, may easily be removed if they observe First, That a local and visible Establishment, such as can be pointed to (though we have many such to refer to in the Eastern parts of Christendom, even in the blindest Ages, besides that at *Rome*) is not essential to the proving of a true Church, because the true Church of Christ was most illustrious before

before it had enjoyed any Local Establishment whatever. Secondly, If we consider, that though there were in those times true Christians, yet it cannot be imagined that they shou'd have appear'd forward to make Discoveries of themselves, in such Seasons, when they experienc'd the sharpest Eyes and heaviest Hands ready to destroy them: So that though we must believe God had always a true Church, yet we stand not necessitated directly to know what numerical and individual People made up that true Church, much less to confess it to have been the present Establishment at *Rome*; no, we can no more be oblig'd to such a Confession as this, than to acknowledge, that the visible company of the *Jews* made up the true Church of God; than, when they were even swallow'd up of Idolatry, and none but the All-seeing Eye of God able to discover the 7000 Knees which had never bowed to *Baal*; it is no Tergiversation therefore; it is no Shuffling, I say (though we can't point to it's individual Members) to assert, That God had even then a true Church, because he has expressly told us, he will have a true Church for ever; but it must be a most irrational consequence to conclude, that it was the *Roman*, when it was the *Roman* alone, from whence arose all those misty Tempests and Darkness, which had obscured the Truth, nay, which had most grievously then oppress'd and over-born her: If we are not now able to name who those good Christians were, that then made up the true Church; we may thank their Furnaces, Inquisitions, and Expurgatory Subtilties, which affrighted them from the Light, and still took care to stifle the least occasions of their manifestations. We confess, God had always his true Church; and this is agreeable to his Word, but we acknowledge not that it was the Church of *Rome*, for this reason, because she was then, as she is now, most contradictory to the Truths of his Word.

And thus I proceed to another Principle of our Church, impeached of Heresie by that of *Rome*, and that is our ways and methods of finding out the Truth: Now these are no other than what depend upon these two divine Principles, Scripture and Reason, which, as they are the immediate Gifts of God, flowing from the Excellency and Perfections of his own blessed Spirit, so methinks they may not improperly be employ'd in his Divine Service: The Religious Man, in Scripture, is frequently Entituled the Wise and the Understanding Man; and Wisdom, and Religion are generally used to denote one and the same thing, but how there can be the greatest Wisdom and Understanding where there must not be the least use or pretences to Reason, I leave to these Despisers of Reason to illustrate. The Wise Man tells us, *A blind Sacrifice is an abomination to the Lord*, and we often meet the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures, lashing at the Sacrifice of Fools, both which are demonstratively comprehended in that rebuke of our Saviour against the People of *Samaria*, saying, *Ye know not what ye Worship*; and now what can all these Passages suggest to us but this, that whosoever will pay a fit and suitable Worship to God, ought thoroughly to know and understand the Nature and Excellency of the Divine Majesty, as far as he has been pleased to reveal himself; and then as one wou'd think, nothing can more effectually instruct us in this Celestial Knowledge, than the very Writings and expresse Revelations of God himself; so it seems to me next door to a contradiction, for any Man to aver, that the most infallible way to come to a right Knowledge and Understanding of God, is to set aside our Reason, without which, 'tis impossible to know or understand at all; or again, to renounce the Scriptures which are the only Books in the World, which his infallible Spirit has left us for our surer guidance and direction to that blessed Knowledge.

Perhaps, it may be suggested here, that the Mysteries and sublime Articles of our Religion, such as the Incarnation, the Trinity, and the Resurrection, which all infinitely transcend the highest Capacities of our Reason, depend not on the use of our Reason, but Faith, which is of those things which are invisible, even to the most piercing Eye of Man's Reason; so that we must leave our Reason in the way to our embracements of them, but this no way weakens the force of our Argument: For these Mysteries surpass indeed the comprehension of our Reason, yet the authority upon which we receive them into our Creed, lies open to our Reason, such as is the voice of the Scriptures, and the example of the purest Ages of the Church of Christ; which Reason recommends to us as the surest guides, to direct us in all Matters of Religion: And though indeed Reason cannot demonstrate to us the ineffable ways and explications of these Truths, yet Reason furnishes us with this Demonstration, that they ought to be received for the Truths of Christ; upon this account, because whatever is proposed to our belief upon such infallible Evidences as the Revelation of God's Word, and the uninterrupted Authority of his Primitive Church in all Ages, ought in reason to be believed as true.

I acknowledge, were not these Articles of our Creed manifestly contained either in the express Words, or in the necessary conclusions of Scripture, or in the explications of the purest Ages of our Religion, the belief of them wou'd be irrational, and these unwarrantably crowded upon the belief of a Christian: And therefore, even in those very Articles, which exceed our Reason, it is still Reason which must justify our Faith: What, is our Reason given us for no other end, than to consult for the ease and satisfaction of our Bodies, or must that most sublime faculty of our Souls be no ways interest'd or engag'd for its own Happiness and Salvation? Again, can we think the Divine Wisdom had no design in dictating the Scriptures,

tures, or has he express'd his intention to reach only the Learned and the Wise? Did not our Lord once make this the most expressive Argument, that the Messiah was come, viz. *The poor have the Gospel Preached unto them?* And must it not seem very strange, that Matters shou'd be so inverted since he is gone, and this very Gospel left to us in Writing, that it is to be inspected now only by Doctors and Philosophers? Though the Poor have the Gospel still Preached unto them; yet the use of the Scriptures may well be registred to make up those defects and imperfections which our Preaching now abounds with, in respect of those more powerful and efficacious Institutions of Christ and his Apostles.

I know none of us who are able to Convert Three Thousand with a Sermon; nor indeed, can we pretend to enforce any thing worthy of belief in you that hear us, but what we our selves fetch from that Fountain of heavenly Wisdom, which is the written Word of God: And then, why every Man may not as well Read, as hear the Gospel read to him; I leave to that blessed Spirit to determine, which exhorteth all Men to search the Scriptures. No doubt, as God has given us Reason to make us capable of Understanding, and Glorifying his Divine Majesty, so has he given us his Scriptures also, on purpose to exalt and enlighten our Reason, and convince us all of the reasonableness of our Religious Services; and I confess, I see not how that Man can be able to pay his reasonable Service to God, who has taken up a belief in him without Reason; for let the Religion professed by such a Man be never so Holy and Pure, and true in its self, still in respect of such a Professor, this must be own'd rather to Chance and Fortune; than such a choice and wisdom as may affirm with the Bless'd Jesus, *We know what we Worship*: For without Knowledge, there can be no Belief, and without Belief, no true coming unto God: But further, what reasonable Satisfaction can this be to any Man, to encourage him in his Perseverance



in his Religion in times of Tryals and Temptations; to consider, he has taken up his Religion by Chance, and though he knows not why, yet still he is to be sure that he is in the right.

But can any thing here touch the Profelytes of Rome, who, without troubling Scripture or Reason for the confirmations of their Evidence, tell us, they enjoy a far more infallible Rock, and certainty of their Faith, to wit, the Voice and Testimony of the Church. In truth, if we search into this Rock, it will appear no other than that Sandy Foundation, which was the choice of the foolish Builder: Let us reason the Case with some *Roman* Votary: Does thy Church, sayest thou, tell thee thy Faith is true, then let me ask thee how thou knowest that the Church which tells thee so is true her self; dost thou appeal to the Marks and Notes of a true Church, then I demand again, how dost thou know what peculiar Marks and Notes are the Marks and Notes of the true Church? Or again, how is it become certain to thee, that all these peculiar Marks and Notes do particularly fit and agree with thy particular Church in all respects? He that gets over these Questions without Scripture and Reason, must be Master of more than a Jesuitical slight and artifice; for this must be to judge of Notes without Judgment, to pronounce a conclusion without Premises; for where the conclusion is the result of Premises, there must needs be reasoning: Indeed, this can be no other, than to reply, Why she is true, because she is true: And yet I dare boldly affirm, they shall never be able to get further in the certainty of Faith, who shall first reject the Scriptures as too ambiguous and unintelligible; and then renounce their Reason as a thing dangerous, and reducing all to a private Spirit. But they are not brought to a stand yet, they have behind a glorious reserve, they will still tell us they have Councils and Fathers on their side; but to express the weakness of this hold, how many Volumes of Learn'd Protestants

testants are there extant, which remain so many monuments of the groundless vanity of their Plea from Fathers; and if the four first general Councils may be allow'd worthy of the name of Councils, we defie the most Artificial Crafts-men of them all to produce thence but one line which may appear serviceable to the cause of Popery.

But to leave this Contest with the Learned, must it not be ridiculous in any unlearned Man to renounce the Scriptures, which were written on purpose for his Instruction in Religion, and which he may of himself be able both to read and understand, as to all matters of belief and practice, and betake himself to pleas from Fathers and Councils, when he is not able so much as to tell the Letters of that Language in which those Fathers and Councils were written, when he can be able to judge neither when those Fathers writ, nor yet what one Opinion they have left behind them: must there not be a much more rational satisfaction from such a plain Text of Scripture as this, *Drink ye all of this*, to invite us to receive the Cup, than a Thousand pretended Quotations from such Fathers and Councils which the unlearn'd are able neither to disprove nor comprehend, to affright us from the Cup, that we shou'd be deceived by the plain real truths of the Gospel; 'tis impossible but the real Doctrines of fallible Men will be liable to deceive us. But after all, is not this to relapse and be found tampering with the dangerous consequences of protestant reasoning, thus to alledge Councils and Fathers: For why does any Man appeal to Councils and Fathers fancies, he makes them the measures of his belief, at least of the truth of that point in which he appeals to them? wou'd he believe as he does, if he apprehended he had no reason from their authorities to believe so, and then how does his Faith differ more from that of a private Judgment, than the Faith of a credulous Protestant, who declares he believes thus and thus, because he judges the Scriptures enjoyn him to believe thus and thus; all the difference that



that I can perceive between the two Churches here is this; The one, to wit, the Papist, Reasons from the Testimonies of fallible Men; but the other, namely, the Protestant, from the assurances of the infallible Dictates of God's Holy Spirit. That which here determines the Belief in both, is no doubt one and the same thing, *viz.* Man's private Judgment, which influences the one to believe so and so, and the other to believe thus and thus, because it appears most reasonable to them to believe so: And I appeal to any one of that Church; whether he would thus absolutely give up his Faith to the Church, did he not think he had great reason so to do; and then again, whether that Man which owns thus much, does not in great measure acknowledge himself a Judge of the Principles of his Religion; let them talk what they will; the Papist judges for himself as well as the Protestant; for if we are said to judge, when we declare to believe the Scriptures upon the authority of an Universal Tradition, may not they be said to judge, when they declare they believe in the Church, upon the single authority of her own assertion?

If they please, they may deny what both they and we do practice; and indeed, what is not only undeniable, but what the very Voice and Commandment of God has enjoin'd us to perform; in one place, directing us to try all things, and hold fast that which is good; in another place, believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits whether they be of God or no: Again, be ye ready to render a reason of the hope that is in you, nay, lastly, we have the express approbation of our Saviour himself, telling us, *If the Blind lead the Blind, they shall both fall into the Ditch*, and again, *why of your selves judge ye not what is right*: Can any thing be more clear, than that the Holy Ghost in these places excites us to respect our own Judgment and Reason in the choice of our Religion: For, how shall that Man be

able to render a Reason of his hope, who makes a Profession of a hope upon no Reason at all? How shall he judge the Spirits that tries them not? Or again, how shall he make tryals, who professes to use neither Judgment nor Reason in matters of Religion? Nay, further, how comes our Saviour to wonder so much, why, *Judge not of your selves what is right*; if nothing be more disagreeable to true Righteousness, than a Man's own private Conclusions and Judgment.

I say again, these Texts must refer to the tryals of Religion, and therefore we may bid much good may do them with their implicit Faith, which is as much as to declare as to my Religion, I believe what I know not, and I know not what I must believe; which is to approve the Spirits without trying; and to conclude them to be of God, without so much as enquiring what kind of Spirits they are of which belong to God: Nay, which is apparently to profess Doctrines, which 'tis impossible they shoud render a Reason of, for without knowledge there can be no Reason given, and no Man will pretend to know that explicitly, of which he professes purely an implicit Belief, nay, perhaps which he understands not that he does believe, till the Church upon an occasion rubs up his Faith and Memory, and tells him he must, and he does believe it. I am sure this is such a kind of Faith, which Christ himself detested to impose; for we may observe, that he never recommended any thing to the belief of the Jews; but what he still confirmed with such Tokens as might convince the meanest Spectators of its Truth; nay, we find he taught his Disciples many essential Doctrines before his Death, which they believed not, but did not Anathematize their incredulity, till they became able to bear them, till they had beheld that most convincing Demonstration then remaining, even the irresistible sign of his Resurrection: Nay, that nothing of certainty

tainty might be wanting to the satisfying the Reason of Man, even after that glorious Demonstration, he humbly condescended to let mistrustful *Thomas* thrust his Fingers into the very holes of the Nails, and behold the Prints in his Side.

Is here any thing like the imposition of an implicit Faith, or such a groundless Belief as obliges us not only to abandon our Reason with all the strongest Convictions of our Senses, but also to renounce the helps even of the inspired Writings of that blessed Comforter, which was sent on purpose to lead us into all Truth: Since Christ himself was pleased thus meekly to condescend in the giving satisfaction to our Infirmities, what kind of relation can that Church bear to him, which disdains a submission to an Examination, either by Reason, or the blessed Rule of God's own Word: I am sure it must be a shrewd sign, that that Church, which makes this refusal, is reconcileable neither to Reason nor Scripture; for were she agreeable to either, why should she so imperiously decline a tryal by the two most Godlike Principles we are enriched with, which certainly Scripture and Reason may be acknowledged to be; neither can it be any great disgrace to the purest Church to be made appear conformable to them. I confess, I can't but admire the subtilty of the Church of *Rome*, in usurping thus an Authority above all Examination, since her Definitions of Faith are such, as far transcend the Explications either of Scripture or Reason, the clearest measures which God has left us to examine by: Is it not much the wisest way to put off such Commodities by the Gross, which we are satisfied won't bear a particular inspection? Is there not much greater security to such a Cause in an implicit Faith, which swallows down all at a lump, than such an explicit one as may be curious and inquisitive, and desire the satisfaction of Sense and Reason; I see no false step here on their Churches

side, in point of Carnal Prudence and Worldly Policy, but methinks that must be an unintelligible Devotion indeed, which does thus contentedly ensnare his Soul for a Pig in a Poke, for what he is neither to scruple, nor yet to understand.

And thus you see upon what contradictory and irreconcilable positions the Church of *England* and the Church of *Rome* are founded at present: that they are as far from one another as Scripture and no Scripture, Reason and no Reason; Antiquity and Innovations, Truth and Fallhoods; and as the Churches stand at variance, so have the faithful Members of our Church upon all occasions and opportunities appear'd in defiance of *Rome's* Corruptions; it is not many years since most of us beheld, and all of us heard with what steadiness and Devotion, with what Resignation to the will of God, and disdain to the pollutions of Men, the Members of our Church, like so many illustrious Confessors withstood the attempts and solicitations, the threatenings and invitations of the Whorish Woman: Withstood them, I say, even then, when many of the Members of our separate Congregations, who had before shew'd themselves most uneasy in their fears of Popery, gave life and boldness to her growing hopes, by their unseasonable Addresses and Compliances. I speak not this with a desire to make advantages of the weakness, or by way of insult over the inconstancy of our fellow Christians now in Charity.

I persuade my self they were rather outreach'd by the policies, than debauch'd by the principles of *Rome*, and there is nothing we ought all more heartily to pray for, or more religiously endeavour than a mutual forgetfulness of all infirmities: but I speak it with hopes, that as such Protestants must acknowledge their error in siding with Popery then; so they will blush when they upbraid our Church as a Daughter of *Babylon* now: if Men wou'd but credit their own eyes, or give place to the argements presented to their  
own

own understandings, we need not appeal to other than our adversaries themselves; whether they can still believe our divine service to be (what some people do ignorantly miscall it) Popery in *English*, who remember the toleration and liberty given to every Soul, to run as far out of our Church and the sound of its divine service as they pleased, managed by the artifice set on foot, and carry'd on by the influence of the Papists: if the way to *Rome* lies through a Communion with our Church as such Men dream, how come the *Romanists* (who are no strangers to their own interests) to seduce Men out of our Communion as the readiest road to Popery; had they seen with some Mens eyes amongst us, and found any thing in our Communion which looks kind and serviceable to the cause of their own superstitions, 'tis not to be believed they wou'd so publickly have tempted all Men out of our Communion, with the alluring promises of the royal favour; I take that liberty and toleration then given by the Papistry, to be so manifest an argument and declaration, of that opposition which our Church, in every particular of its constitution bears to Popery, which, as every eye might discern it, so every well-meaning Man ought to be convinced by it, and retract his censures. The Papists knew well enough there wou'd be no enlarging their own, without first thinning our Churches, that the Mass Book cou'd make no advances, whilst the Common-Prayer stood in reputation; that the only probability they cou'd have of making any Profelytes must be to get Men as far out of the bosom of our Church as possible.

Methinks the pretences of some in separation from us, who reproach our service for Popish, and the practices of the Papists who were for drawing all Men out of our Communion as a bar to Popery, are very hard to be reconciled. The Conclusion from such considerations must be this, Either the Papists understand not what makes up the Popish Religion,

or

or the divine service of our Church, which they appeared so eager to suppress and disgrace, can be no friend to Popery.

No, be not deceived my Beloved, the infamous names and characters, such as Schismatics, Hereticks, and the like, which they fasten upon us, and wherewith they attempt to blacken the brightest services of all our holy ministrations; the continual succession of Plots, Stratagems, and Intrigues, which from Age to Age we have heard and seen formed by Papists against our holy reform'd Church, from the very first appearance of its establishment, are and have been Arguments sufficient to convince all Generations, of the irreconcilable distance between the Doctrines of *Rome*, and the principles of the Church of *England*: It must be astonishing therefore to consider, what Sport and Pastime *Rome* makes of us after all: when she still so far intoxicates our heads by her snares of Division, wherewith she lyes in wait to deceive, and shatters all the foundations of our wisdom and understanding, by those winds of Doctrines which she has raised and let loose amongst us, that we turn the wrath and disaffection we profess to Popery, against that Church which has in so many, in such illustrious instances manifested herself the noblest bulwork against Popery, which we may with modesty express to be the only terror and envy of the Papists. Is not this the most formidable master-piece of those deluders, to work up a profess'd enemy to such a thoughtless zeal of indignation, as to make him fall foul upon his friends, and under the pretence of wounding his enemy, give the mortal stroke to his own strongest defence, which must be the accomplishment of all those (shou'd they ever have their end, which God forbid) who labour to overthrow the Church of *England* (whom *Rome* has ever treated as her most deadly foe) in order to the reforming Religion in such a manner wherein it may remain out of all danger of Popery; this is such an undertaking wherein I am  
sure



sure the hearts and hands of *Romanists* will never be wanting.

The most weak and feeble Animals are seldom to be caught twice in the same Ginns, neither will the silliest of Creatures run with open Eyes upon the naked Toil; nay, is it not a common proverbial Observation among us, that even the burnt Child dreads the Fire? and shall we with our singed Fingers catch at those flames of Disunion, wherewith our Adversaries have so often reduced us to the most terrible Extremities, wherewith in the last Age they had well nigh consumed both us and our Religion? When we have so fatally smarted under the Sting and Poison, shall we still hug and cherish the Viper that breeds it? O no, let not us who really wish well to the true *Israel* of God, who have experienced, and must be abundantly sensible of the Uncleanneſs and Abominations lodged in the inworks of *Babylon*; let not us, I say, fortifie her Walls by the works of our Hands, let us not protest against her Pollutions, and at the same time do the Drudgeries of her Tyranny; exclaim against her Superſtitious, and pull down the Holy Temple of God's Truth, carry the name of Protestants and Reformists, and apply all our Parts, and Wisdom, and Counsels in the undermining the sacred foundations of that Protestant Church, which is the most solid and beauteous Pillar in the Reformation; no, I beseech you my Beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus, that ye be rather cloathed with Meekness, and like that glorious Author and Finisher of our Faith, put on Bowels of Love and Reconciliation, that this may appear before all the World to be the true, natural and proper Character of an *English* Protestant, That he is one, who is more large in his Charities, and humble in his Censures, more compassionate to his Brethren, and forgiving to his Enemies, more devoted to God, and inseparable from the Services of his Church, than all other Sects and Professions of Christians whatever. To  
conclude



conclude all, let not us, to whom God has vouchsafed the inestimable Blessing of a right Knowledge and Faith in Christ, suffer so glorious a Treasure to lie dead and languid, and fruitless in our Souls for want of Works: Let us convince the World of the Excellency of our Faith and Religion, in the Uprightness and Purity of our Lives, always bearing in our Minds this Description of the Holy Apostle, in which he explains to us the end and intention of our Christian Faith, saying, the Grace of God which bringeth Salvation, hath appeared to all Men, teaching us, that denying Ungodliness, and Worldly Lusts, we shou'd live Soberly, and Righteously, and Godlily in this present World.

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